

## **LBI residents have their say against \$71M beach project**

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— With no opposition to shout them down, about 100 beachfront homeowners hoped Sunday that they could finally explain why they object to a proposed \$71 million beach-replenishment project on Long Beach Island.

"All everyone hears is that we are against the dunes and against the project," said Michael Logan, one of the organizers of a meeting of homeowners held here at the Holiday Inn on Route 72. "We're not against beach replenishment and we're not against maintaining our beaches. But this project is too large as it's designed now and it's going to adversely affect property values."

"And the state is asking us to give them easements on our properties that would last forever," Logan said. "What property owner would sign their rights away forever? Give us an option of temporary easements and we'd be willing to talk."

But while organizers of the meeting clearly wanted homeowners to talk in terms of compromise and pushing for changes to the plan, it was clear that a good percentage of the those who turned out for the meeting oppose the project completely.

"What we need is a clause somewhere that tells them to go away," one disgruntled homeowner said .

Still, the purpose of the meeting was to organize the homeowners and adopt a strategy for challenging the project. For that, the homeowners are turning to lawyer Kenneth A. Porro, who maintains an office in Tuckerton. Porro said he has had several years experience representing homeowners in Ocean City, Cape May County, which also faced a major replenishment project.

Porro told the audience that there is room for compromise in the project.

"What you have to do is go to your local officials and impress on them that they need to ask for changes," he said. "I truly believe that your local officials have their hearts in the right place. The problem is that they haven't read the document you're being asked to sign."

The state Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers, which designed the project, has asked about 800 homeowners on the island to sign easements granting the Army Corps access to the project. The easements, however, would not end when the project is complete.

The project will be maintained — meaning sand would be periodically pumped on the beaches — for about 50 years. But Porro said that as written, the property owners would essentially be granting an easement in perpetuity.

However, few homeowners have signed the easements and many that have are trying to have them revoked. Porro said the group had already found leverage by not signing the easements.

"If none of you sign this, I think the project will die," Porro said. "I think that in good faith we should look for a scaled-back project that we can all live with. But without these easements, the state would have to go to condemnation proceedings. That would mean hearings for each property and they would have to pay fair market value. Considering the size of the project, I don't see that happening."

Porro said the state is currently offering only \$1 for the easements.

Homeowners also object to the size of the dunes, which would be about 22 feet high, and provisions that require more public access and restrooms, probably in the form of ports-potties, on the beaches.

After the initial presentation, homeowners met privately with Porro to determine if they wanted to join in retaining his services.

The meeting was also free of opposition from groups that support the project. Some municipal officials on

the island had been pushing for supporters of the replenishment project to attend the meeting, but no protests materialized.